

Rogue Submarine Newsletter

Volume 22

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Rogue Readers,

1. Quick update
2. Enjoy a Rogue Outlaws Chapter!

1. Quick Update

Well, Rogue Neptune is still drafted, meaning I didn't 'undraft' it since the 2Q newsletter. Duh. Or since the 3Q newsletter. Double-Duh. It's on ice waiting for me to finish Rogue Outlaws before publishing them together Reminder: Both books will cover different phases of the same mission, which takes place in Yemen.

I'm making very slow progress, but I will publish something in time for Christmas. At the very least, I'll publish Rogue Neptune alone. Reviewing my progress on Rogue Outlaws,,, 10% complete at the 2Q newsletter, 30% at 3Q. Now I'm about 55% done. Slow for me, due to distractions.

However, I pulled myself out of the distractions by writing the following humorous chapter. I wasn't sure whether I'd keep it in Outlaws, but I'm tending to think I will. There are no spoilers in it. So, everyone feel free to enjoy.

2. Enjoy a Rogue Outlaw's Chapter!

CHAPTER ??

While showering, Jake spied a blob of dark greenness contrasting the silvery sheen of the stall's metal floor.

Before meandering rivulets could carry away this peculiar and wonderous discovery, he scooped it with his toes and felt its squishiness. With hushed anticipation, he shifted his weight to his opposite foot and then carefully orchestrated his well-conditioned leg and torso muscles to hoist the surprise to his waist.

Like a striking viper, his palm cupped his foot and secured the prize. He then lowered his foot, lifted the reward to his face, and identified it.

Broccoli.

He recalled an adage stating that the closer one gets to the divine, the one more becomes like a child.

Embracing the philosophy—testing it—he ran a silly idea through his head, found it patently absurd, but then decided to enact said idea as an actual plan.

The *Specter's* commander had never considered himself completely rational, and he gaily accepted that the next minutes of his life would have a great impact on his own sanity.

Stupefied, he bent his knees to the tile and cupped the floret in his palms. “A gift!”

His mind raced for both questions and answers.

The first mystery to tickle his mind was the origin of the flowering vegetable's rogue floret.

Though he liked broccoli, he'd seen no such ingredient being served during the day. Breakfast had been a hearty collection of pastries and meats, lunch fresh (halibut) fished from Socotra's waters, and dinner steak and potatoes. All forms of fresh vegetables had been salads, and Jake knew he'd not seen any members of the cabbage family being plated recently within his submarine.

This vegetable had not come from any meal he'd eaten that day.

Could it have come up the drain?

No, he concluded. Even if broccoli had found its way onto the *Specter's* menu earlier in the week, cabbages lacked the innate ability to climb up pipes.

The mystery deepened.

He redoubled his efforts to resolve it with reason, and reason demanded that he, after exhausting natural explanations, explore malicious human agency.

Could it be a message?

And if so, what message could it be?

Jake knew that if he unleashed his mind into such an abyss of conjecture, he'd lose it forever.

Instead of exploring the message, he paused to consider the possibility thereof.

Could someone have staged the vegetable within his shower stall, intending for the inevitable anguish of confusion that would torment him? He could think of no motivations for such an assault, but he kept the possibly open as his first viable option worthy of consideration.

"Bastards. No... they'd never do something so patently evil." Then he let his mind generate the untrue accusations of disloyalty of a paranoid leader. "But maybe they would. It's probably LaFontaine... he's the sneakiest. Yeah, he's jealous and wants my job, and a broccoli attack in the shower stall would be his first move! Damn him!"

Resigned to prove his theory of high treason by broccoli, the *Specter's* commander stood and turned off the water's flow. In the steaming silence, he cupped the evidence in his hand and stepped from the shower.

While drying himself, he considered Claude LaFontaine's future.

The *Specter's* engineer was a nicotine-fed, anxious man, and Jake—based upon no evidence other than his feelings of the moment—concluded that the wiry, chain smoking man had been plotting against him for years.

A broccoli floret today. A knife in the back tomorrow. If left unchecked, LaFontaine would betray him to his demise, leaving Jake a shell of a man.

"Not on my ship!"

There would be discipline. There would be justice. An example must be made to stop LaFontaine—the ruinous traitor—and to deter the others.

But then, a pang of mercy washed over Jake.

He must first be fair, above all. Failure to show justice would threaten his rule of the ship, and he would hold court to let the Frenchman explain himself. Oh, Jake would be wary of theatrical pleading, pledges of future loyalty, or other gestures of respect, but he would dismiss them as the hysterical desperation of a foiled criminal.

But, if the engineer confessed, he would live.

However, the slightest denial, the merest hint of continued disloyalty... Jake cringed at what he might do to the man. Then, as we towed him dry, a new piece of evidence materialized.

A second, smaller floret of broccoli appeared on his bare buttocks.

Jake's beliefs quaked under the scrutiny of new evidence.

The pride of having committed to his opinion about LaFontaine shouted within him to cancel the new evidence. Crush it. Stick with what is already known.

But his conscience knew better. He had to reexamine old evidence in light of the new.

Grappling with the mystery like his namesake, the Biblical Jacob who'd wrestled the angel, Jake resolved a new logical conclusion.

It hinged upon the possible relation between the larger and smaller florets of broccoli. The relation was unnecessary, but it could be true and even likely since probabilities dictated, under gravity's pull on the cabbage creatures and the yanking power of the rushing water, that broccoli generally tends to travel downwards towards the metal floors of submarine shower stalls, and not upwards.

Claude LaFontaine was an unlikely source for having planted the smaller floret of broccoli. Jake was all but certain he would've noticed the Frenchman's hands probing within his pants, around his hips, and onto his shapely buttocks. The man's nicotine addiction assured his trembling hands were incapable of such subtlety of treachery.

Perhaps an accomplice, one with pick-pocketing skill?

No, Jake decided. Such a conspiracy would unravel under the intense scrutiny with which the *Specter's* commander must address such effrontery.

Although LaFontaine could have planted the first, Jake assumed for expediency that a single, unifying theory could explain the origins of both rogue cabbages. Whatever that theory was, remained elusive to him.

But he would find it.

Realizing the errors of his prior conclusion, he collapsed to his knees in shame and begged God for forgiveness for his false accusation of his loyal and loving engineer.

Then, as if a prayer were answered, Jake understood everything.

Enthused by his divine revelation, he slid into his underwear and then grabbed his beige pants.

He reconsidered his attire for sharing his divine message of broccoli, his prophecy.

Underwear was sufficient.

Underwear was perfect.

As he stepped into the passageway's air, dampness on his skin enveloped him in coolness. Alone in his near-nakedness, he tiptoed towards the control room where he expected to find two people half asleep on the midnight watch of his cargo submarine.

As he passed the galley's door, he glanced inside the cramped food-preparation alcove. A bag of frozen broccoli florets appeared in the garbage can with footprints on it.

He concluded that someone had dropped, stepped on, and accidentally opened the bag after it had fallen to the deck.

The discovery jogged a memory from earlier that day—just prior to his shower, actually—when Jake had darted into the galley to shove some random morsel of between-meal victuals into his mouth. After he'd jumped into the galley and grabbed an apple from a fruit bowl, he'd spied a cook cleaning the broccoli-laden mess for which the disposed bag served as a reminder.

Jake then remembered having stopped to assist the cook in his cleaning of said florets.

He paused and reconsidered his theories.

Yes, the galley's broccoli explosion—for lack of a better moniker of the event—presented an alternate theory to the origins of both florets he'd found in his shower. Jake mentally acknowledged this mundane possibility of the cabbage creatures' origins, but, based upon his urgent hope that he'd been gifted by God with a divine revelation, he stuck with his primary theory.

Redoubling his commitment to it, he pushed through the door into the control room.

Alone at the sonar seats, Julien listened lazily to the ocean's sounds. At his mechanical control station, Henri read a book Jake couldn't identify from the distance.

The silver-haired Frenchman looked up and chortled. "Underwear? Is this the new uniform?"

His back firm, Jake stood tall and remained silent so the French mechanic could take in his image.

Disturbed by the moving air currents, Julien glanced at Jake, giggled, looked away, and then looked back. “I don’t know what to say. Are you okay, Jake?”

For effect, Jake replied in French, overemphasizing his efforts to eliminate his anglophone accent, serving his diabolical purpose of accentuating the torturous grating of his American grind over the ears of his colleagues.

“I am blessed.”

Henri swiveled in his chair to face his boss. “You’re insane.”

Jake chuckled. “You’ve known that for a long time, my friend. Regardless, I assure you that I have reason to suspect that divine intervention has just occurred on this submarine.” Jake then summarized the shower’s discoveries and the evidence he’d analyzed thus far.

With no better offers for his time, Henri encouraged his boss. “Please, do tell. What do you conclude?”

Looking upward towards the numinous, Jake confessed. “I have been gifted a charism of the Holy Spirit.”

Henri rolled with the claim. “Okay. Which one?”

Revealing the two off-sized florets, Jake proclaimed his gift. “I give you... Ass Manna.”

Scowling, Julian flipped his wrist and looked away. “I need to listen for submarines.”

Henri, however, believed—or sold his mockery with impeccable acting. “Yes! God is great! How wonderful to have been graced. Shall we pray in gratitude?”

Having expected complete rejection, Jake appreciated Henri’s surprise playfulness. “No, not until I put on some clothes. I just wanted to share this discovery immediately, before I would forget crucial details or fail to share it for fear of mockery.”

The Frenchman nodded. “Of course. Of course. You were wise and brave.” He then lowered his tone. “Are you certain this was manna, specifically from your ass, as you say? Could it not have been from the galley?”

“Oh. That is indeed a possibility, and I’ll be sure to consider it over time as I analyze this potential miracle. But at the moment, I know in my heart that I’ve been called to feed the hungry with endless streams of broccoli flowing from my ass.”

Henri frowned. “Why would God give you such a gift on a fully provisioned submarine?”

“God only knows.”

“What about the nature of this possible new manna being broccoli?” Henri flipped through pages of the book before him, which revealed itself as his pocket Bible. “Biblical tradition had manna gifted to the Israelites in the desert being... white like coriander seed and tasting like a wafer made with honey.” He closed the book. “I’ve heard it might be some sort of beetle cocoon, in reality.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. God sometimes uses nature as tools in his miracles.”

Sensing his joke losing steam, Jake shrugged. “Whatever. Times are harder now. This is Twenty Twenty. You want to survive in the new desert, eat your damned broccoli. No tasty sweet manna for you.”

“Damned? I think you’re misusing the term.”

“You’re twisting my words.”

“Not really. You said ‘damned’, and it has a specific meaning.”

Julien reengaged in the conversation. “Yeah. I agree with Henri. It has a specific meaning. If that’s not what you mean, don’t say it. For a guy with the Gift of Broccoli, you suck at prophesizing.”

Jake conceded defeat. “Fine. Maybe it isn’t ass manna. Maybe it’s only broccoli sticking to me as I walked from the galley to the shower. In fact, I’ll graciously yield to your observations and rank your theory ahead of mine, although I must continue my search for the truth. Time and rigorous analysis will tell.”

Henri nodded the gentle approval of a coddling psychologist. “Good idea. Let it simmer for a bit before jumping to conclusions.”

A chill consumed Jake, reminding him of his poor choice of uniform. “I’m heading back to my room. Thanks for playing. Good night, gents.”

Both Frenchman bid him farewell.

In his stateroom, Jake felt an inkling to eavesdrop on Henri and Julien.

It was a commanding officer’s right to decide when to listen to compartments within his ship, especially the control room. Being part of a submarine’s crew, stuck in a tight environment where sounds carried around myriad corners and into randomly wandering ears and strategically placed microphones, included the tacit

agreement that privacy was a privilege, not a right, on a submerged war machine.

At his foldout desk, he flipped a switch to pipe sounds from the control room microphones into his stateroom.

Julien was speaking. "... said it was a joke, but he seemed to believe it."

Henri replied. "He didn't believe it for a second, but there was truth in his silly gesture."

"Such as?"

"Proper perspective."

"Now I think you're both crazy. You don't pay me enough to work with psychopaths."

"He's perfectly rational, lad, I assure you. His point was to take a step back and review the world from a fresh perspective."

"He needed our permission? In his underwear?"

Jake chuckled under his breath. "Sharp kid. Good insights."

Henri then countered. "We as a human species need to reassess what we think we know. It's an act of humility to turn back from a belief when presented new evidence. We all crave to appear consistent and truthful, but the hardest thing is to admit fault, which is an ironically necessary step in achieving the truthfulness we crave. It's difficult, but to fail is to perpetuate lies. That was his point, and in this age of madness, I appreciate it."

"I can't argue that. So, Jake was revealing to us what you might call a Post-COVID perspective of assessing what's real?"

"You might call it that. However, I'd instead call it Post-COVID Humility."

Julien's pitch rose, and Jake envisioned him nodding. "Sure. Call it what you want. Silly as it was, I admit that it was a rational consideration."

"Yeah. It was a logical approach to resolving his mystery, giving both faith and reason a voice. But if he pursues this line of understanding further, I'm afraid we'll never see him again."

Julien's pitch rose. "Why not?"

"Because we may lose him as he learns who he is. Anyone with free will, his resources, and a childlike willingness to rediscover the world will become a new person. Self-generated fallacies will disappear, and a recreated being will emerge."

"You speak too loftily."

"Nevertheless, you see my point."

“I guess so. You’re afraid that he’s going to reinvent himself from the so-called ashes of COVID, and he’ll no longer be a part of this fleet.”

“I can only pray for our sakes that’s false.”

Then Julien shocked Jake. “What if he doesn’t? He’s getting old, and the newer generation needs to rise and replace the aging. Maybe it’s time for him to retire.”

Jake guffawed. “I’m only forty-one.”

Henri defended reason from youth’s exuberance. “Careful, lad. You have a strong mind, but remember that decades of experience are required to form your wisdom.”

“True, but you can’t argue that the young must replace the old?”

“I just hope that the time is not now for us.”

Jake secured the audio flow and crawled into his rack. As he replayed the debate between the Frenchmen in his mind, sleep consumed him.

His final thought was a plea to the universe that his species would seek truth in humility before the truths it ignored could destroy it.

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Thanks for reading! - John